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## The Messiah According to Sholem Asch

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CATHOLICS will have always a ready sympathy for the victims of religious persecution in any land. Even when pent-up emotions and hysteria impel such victims to give expression to their racial or religious sentiments in terms somewhat derogatory to other peoples or classes of believers, the mere consideration of the provocation given in the particular instance will, as a rule, beget an attitude of charitable tolerance towards their extravagant utterances. There is, however, a limit beyond which tolerance becomes a vice. And that limit is surely far exceeded when, impelled by his zeal for Jewry, an author ventures to emasculate Christianity and reduce it to an indefinite, even degraded, form of Judaism. This is what Sholem Asch has done in *The Nazarene*.

The author of *The Nazarene* is an exiled Warsaw Jew. His work was written originally in Yiddish, and was thus addressed primarily to his own coreligionists. Possibly, then, our main quarrel should be with

the publishers who have seen fit to recommend *The Nazarene* to the American public as an authentic picture of the beginnings of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

*The Nazarene* purports to be more than fiction; it claims to be an historical novel, based on historical facts and the accepted findings of scholarly research. Hence it is subject to the criteria of historical literature. We maintain that the established facts of history (above all, sacred history) must not be changed or doctored to serve any ulterior purpose—certainly not for political or sectarian propaganda. The actual circumstances and details of historical occurrences must be adhered to and not falsified in any work which claims to mirror faithfully an epoch or an age. Does *The Nazarene* give us a true picture of the Jewish life current at the time of Our Lord? Does it preserve the general historic framework as attested by the Gospels and all other authentic records of primitive Christianity? Does it state accurately and fairly the facts contained in these authentic documents? These are the questions that will engage us here.

#### A DISTORTION OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The fundamental theme—the assumption—of Sholem Asch is that Jesus Christ was positively not the promised Messiah of the Jews; He was the Messiah only of the Gentiles. However, he urges, Jew and Gentile can and should live harmoniously together, because both Christ and the Pharisees agreed on the principles of the love of God and the love of man as “the pillars of human faith” (pp. 687, 592). Now, obviously this highly desirable harmony is but ill promoted when a Jewish writer indulges in gratuitous

<sup>1</sup> By request of the publishers, we are told, “one of the great authorities of the Jewish Theological Seminary read the proofs with a magnifying glass [a rather odd procedure], looking for inaccuracies, and found Sholem Asch as sound and learned a scholar as he” (*sic!*). Kenneth Worthington Cary, of the Union Theological Seminary, is likewise quoted as declaring that “the author’s knowledge of his subject is phenomenal.”

distortions of Christian history and sacred Christian beliefs.

Mr. Asch develops his fundamental theme in three representative characters. First, there is Pan Viadomsky, the pagan Roman Hegemon (in authentic history, Cornelius the centurion) who superintended Christ's passion and crucifixion, and who now surviving in Poland as a representative of Christianity *must* believe in Christ's mission. Obviously this character is borrowed from the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew, who reviled Christ on His way to Calvary and was doomed to wander restlessly through the world until judgment day. Secondly, there is the pious, sympathetic Rabbi Nicodemus, who is pictured as the representative of pure Judaism, and thus (despite authentic history) cannot accept Christ's mission as the Messiah of the Jews. Thirdly, there is Judas, who in all sincerity tried to believe that Christ's mission embraced also the Jews, but ended his life in despair. A second reincarnated personage who also figures rather prominently in the story testifies in favor, not of Christ's Messiahship, but of Jewish orthodoxy. The only convinced believer in Christ's mission is the rabidly fanatical Polish anti-Semite. Around Jesus Christ and these representative characters other friends and opponents of the Rabbi of Nazareth play predetermined roles.

A respect for historical accuracy is never allowed to interfere with Mr. Asch's development of his thesis. For almost two millennia Jewish apologists and anti-Christian writers have combed authentic history for testimony or arguments that might tend to undermine the reverence and influence which the mere recital of the Gospel story had won for the Prophet of Nazareth. Mr. Asch now invents a Gospel of Judas and reincarnates certain of Christ's contemporaries to furnish very belatedly the "first-hand" testimony for which authentic history has been ransacked in vain.

## GOSPELS PRIMARILY HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Throughout his work Mr. Asch consistently ignores or distorts the authentic accounts of Christian origins. He seems utterly unaware that the Gospels rank among the most authentic of all historical documents—that to challenge them is to impugn all history. Doubtless, even Christians are at times liable to forget that the Gospels are primarily historical documents—that the sole aim of their authors was to set down a plain and unequivocal description of events which they had either personally witnessed (Matthew and John), or which they knew from the testimony of eyewitnesses of unquestionable credibility (Luke and Mark). For example, in the first two verses of his Gospel Saint Luke tells Theophilus that he is setting down “a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, *as delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.*”

Viewed merely as historical documents, how are the Gospels to be assayed? They are models of objectivity, far surpassing in this respect even those secular works which have been always and universally acclaimed as the classical paragons of objective history (Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, and Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*). In view of their relation to the facts they are recording, it is actually amazing how the Evangelists could have so entirely excluded all trace of personal feelings from their narratives. Despising all effort for literary effects, they set down their facts with seldom a comment; still more rarely do they make an effort to draw any conclusions from the facts which they relate. They are evidently supremely confident that the mere statement of meticulous fact will be all-sufficient; that the facts will speak for themselves.

And to whom was this plain statement of facts presented? Not to people separated from the events by

thousands of years and thousands of miles, but to a generation which could easily check the accuracy of every fact recorded. Saint Paul, for example, can still appeal to the survivors of the five hundred brethren (who saw the Risen Christ), "of whom many remain until this present." Even the first-century opponents of Saint John never challenge the historicity of the events recorded in the Gospels; they accept unquestioningly the facts as related, but err in their views on the person of Christ (being thus guilty of theological and not historical error).

Of course, the supreme confirmation of the credibility of the New Testament writings lies in the fact that, with the single exception of Saint John (who was *only* tortured for his beliefs), all the writers died in testimony of the truth of the facts which they recorded. This is, of course, only the baldest summary of the arguments for the authenticity and historicity of the New Testament writings. We do not even touch on the confirmatory evidence to be drawn from pagan sources. Saint Augustine has pointed out that the conversion of the Greek and Roman peoples to a false Gospel (preached by a Prophet of a despised race) would be a far more inexplicable mystery than any of the miracles recorded in the Gospels. And Tertullian can refer his contemporary opponents to Pilate's official report of Christ's condemnation and death still to be found in the Imperial Archives at Rome.

#### CHRIST AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Mr. Asch brushes aside all the authentic evidence of history, which he would fain supplant with an invented Gospel and Talmudic traditions of unknown date and provenance. Jewish apologists invariably fail to realize that the credibility of the Old Testament stands or falls with the New Testament. Let us suppose for a moment that Jewish apologists succeeded in proving that all belief in Christ as the promised

Messiah of the Old Testament was mistaken, what then becomes of the sacred books of the Jews? Under such an assumption, the Old Testament is nothing more than a long record of unfulfilled prophecies and broken promises. All these prophecies and promises were either pure hallucinations of the Old Testament writers, or, if the prophecies were inspired and the promises actually made by the Deity, both alike were Divine mockeries of sadly tormented man. What a blasphemous picture of the Deity would thus be presented by the Old Testament! Unless Christ is the true Messiah foretold in the Old Testament, not only is the New Testament, but still more the Old, a bitter delusion. Once we accept Christ as the true Messiah, all the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament are evidently fulfilled, and both Testaments bear the evident stamp of Divine inspiration and love.

As a matter of fact, this very work of Asch furnishes unwilling testimony to the historicity of the Gospels, for we find Asch forced to misrepresent or suppress events which he does not venture to deny.

As there are persistent rumors that *The Nazarene* will be presented as a motion picture, it may be well that the Catholic public should be acquainted with the general character of the work. A protest in advance may be more effective than a boycott of the film after it has been made.

Asch describes Christ as a tall man with the frail, delicate body of a strengthless child (pp. 150, 167), like a skeleton (p. 391). His face has a strange pallor (p. 391); very often He becomes pale after sustained effort, and grows at times so weak that Simon Peter has to carry Him away from the crowds in his powerful arms (pp. 155, 162 sqq., 171, 205). According to Asch (p. 262), Jesus was not Messiah-conscious at the age of twelve. Later He followed a Nazarite (John the Baptist?) to the wilderness, because the footsteps of the Messiah had been heard (p. 267). It is only

after His journey to Tyre and Sidon, where He could not sleep for five nights because of the gross immorality of the pagans (p. 335), that a great change came over Him (341 sq.), and presumably He now becomes Messiah-conscious. He is then publicly acknowledged as the Messiah by Peter, the rest of the Apostles, and even the blind Bar-Talmai (Bartimeus). Before the Sanhedrin, Christ publicly proclaims Himself the Messiah, and is accused of blasphemy and sentenced as "a child of death" (pp. 641 sq.).

### CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP DENIED

Asch concedes the possession of some kind of thaumaturgic power by Christ. However, to the Hegemon Cornelius Christ's magical powers seemed inferior to those practised by the Chaldeans (pp. 146, 391), so that here even Cornelius is made to testify against Christ's Messiahship.<sup>2</sup> However, not only had the members of the Sanhedrin "to practise the (thaumaturgic?) art in their capacity as judges" (p. 146), but it was only right and proper that "the learned should assist the poor by prayers and miracles" (p. 154). Miracles were "commonplaces among the Jews" (p. 390), and by no means a proof of the Messiah (p. 299). According to Asch, the power to perform true miracles was one of the official prerogatives of the Rabbis.

How then, according to Asch, did Christ perform miracles? Sometimes with herbs and grasses (pp. 269, 288); at other times by the imposition of hands (p. 288). However, this power was transient (pp. 312, 314, 340). A few of Asch's explanations of Christ's miracles may be given. Omitting the details found in the Synoptics, Asch creates the impression that the daughter of Jairus was merely asleep (286 sqq.). Although Asch describes several incidents as taking place

<sup>2</sup> Scarcely a single one of Asch's characters is consistent. They are modified by the author to suit the circumstances. This is the only instance I know in which a "scholar" attributes magical powers to the Chaldeans, who elsewhere are hailed merely as astrologers.

at Naim, the only event declared by the Synoptics to have taken place there—the raising of the widow's son—is omitted. Lazarus is described as “a skeleton” and “nit-wit” (pp. 104 sq., 392 sq.), who was like clay in the hands of Christ. It had been whispered that he had fallen into a long faint (p. 516). The Gospel account, of course, leaves no doubt as to his death: “Lord, he is already fetid, for he is dead four days” (John xi, 39). Of Christ's own Resurrection Asch merely asserts that “secret rumors were current that the Rabbi had disappeared from his grave, and that he showed himself in the life to his disciples” (p. 691). Peter's public declarations (Acts ii, 32, iii, 15, and especially iv, 10) can scarcely be described as “secret rumors,” and Peter, like the other witnesses, died in testimony of his assertions.

#### OUR LADY'S VIRGINITY ASSAILED

In Asch's invented Gospel of Judas, Our Lady narrates the events of the infancy and boyhood of Christ to Simon Peter and Judas (pp. 250-284). Our Lady is depicted as an ordinary God-fearing Jewish woman, concerned with the proper guidance of her children (!), especially after the death of her husband, Joseph. From her marriage with Joseph were born four sons and four daughters (p. 262), of whom Jesus was the eldest son or the first-born (pp. 252 sqq.). At the time of the census Joseph took his wife to Bethlehem. Mary promised to dedicate her child, if it were a son, to the Lord (p. 256). On the occasion of Christ's birth, she confessed that she was a sinful woman and unlearned in the Law (*ibid.*). Let us charitably assume that Mr. Asch has no conception of the resentment which this indefensible distortion of sacred history will arouse in Christian readers. Our Lady was entirely unaware that her son was the Messiah (pp. 262, 267). After His return from the desert, where He had spent several years with the Nazarite, Mary urged



Him to seek a sage to be released from His vow, so that He might marry "because at eighteen it is the time for the bridal canopy" (p. 268). But He insisted upon keeping His vow, and left His mother and sisters and brothers to be cared for by His brother, Joseph (p. 269). It was only after several years of absence that He returned with His disciples and Mary Magdalen to celebrate a Sabbath with His Mother. Thus, according to Mr. Asch, at the age of about twenty Christ had already progressed far with His mission.<sup>3</sup> The moment that one applies logic to Mr. Asch's narrative, it falls wide apart.

Needless to say, Asch stresses the significance of the expression, "first-born" (first-born son). Yet, as a proclaimed Hebrew scholar, Asch should surely know that the Hebrew word *bekor* is an absolute and not a relative term, and thus contains no reference to children born subsequently. The term merely emphasizes the fact that the child in question is subject to all the provisions of the Mosaic Law regarding the first-born.

#### A FIGMENT OF THE IMAGINATION

Asch has taken great pains in his description of the character of Judas, and devotes 170 pages to his apocryphal Gospel. The fact that he represents this Gospel as written in codex form and in Samaritan or Phoenician script, again belies the scholarship attributed to Asch in his publishers' press notices. Judas is a scholar of the Messianic Companionship, which met frequently at the synagogue of Nicodemus in Jerusalem. According to p. 212, he "has a wife and child," but according to p. 456 he has none. He had already found many other Messiahs before he met Christ, and he manifests his utter sincerity by leaving his wife and child, who thus serve a very useful purpose at this juncture (p. 212). Although he is concerned at his

<sup>3</sup> Regarding Christ's approximate age when He began His public mission, *cf.* John viii, 57: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?"

Master's apparent neglect of the laws of purity (p. 302), he is so solicitous for His reputation that he hastens to town to sell two costly ornaments, brings back four baskets of bread, but finds that the Lord has already fed the multitude. Two costly ornaments traded for four baskets of bread! However, Judas is still afraid of losing his faith, and asks Christ to strengthen his belief through a miracle (p. 318). Without following the nonsense in further detail, let us state that Judas betrayed Christ merely to furnish Him with an opportunity of proving Himself as unmistakably the Messiah. Apparently, Judas (or Mr. Asch) was unaware of a similar spectacular suggestion made to Christ by Satan. Need we say that Mr. Asch is describing a figment of his own imagination, not the historical character of Judas Iscariot?

#### RACIAL HATRED AND LASCIVIOUS WRITING

It is with reluctance that we turn to evidences of the racial hatred which characterizes Mr. Asch's work from beginning to end. The most bitter enemy of the Jews is the *Polish Catholic*, Pan Viadomsky, a professor, theologian, follower of Nietzsche, a profound student of the classical languages, and a forger of documents—surely an extraordinary combination (pp. 3-14). He collaborates with Christian scholars in editing anti-Jewish books (p. 375), and it takes a little Jewish girl, Blimele, to give him an object-lesson in what is meant by love of neighbor (p. 697).

Surely it is not by mere chance that there are twenty-five references in the book to the Germans. The Jews "had a particular hatred for the German Cavalry employed by the Romans (p. 56). It was the Germans at the Court of Herod Antipater(!) that beheaded John the Baptist and placed his head on a silver platter before the ten-year-old Salome. But most noteworthy of all is the beastly, murderous Hermanus, represented as a wolf and bloodhound ready to devour

any Jew. It is he who seizes and scourges Jesus Christ, crowns Him with thorns, lashes Him unmercifully on the way to Calvary, and finally nails Him to the Cross (656 sqq.). The Pharisees had no connection with Christ's condemnation and crucifixion; they were actually His well-wishers and defenders!

Notwithstanding the high spiritual motives attributed to his work, Mr. Asch takes full advantage of the opportunity offered by the penitent of Magdala for lascivious writing. His whole account of Mary Magdalen is fantastic, without historical foundation, self-contradictory in parts, and at times positively indecent. With a similar utter disregard for or ignorance of historical data, Asch recasts Pilate's early life so that he can assign filthy biography to Claudia Procula. It is our impression that these elements contributed far more to the wide popularity of Mr. Asch's work than the more serious purposes emphasized in the press notices. A true scholar can feel nothing but scorn for Mr. Asch's perversions of history in these passages.

As such emphasis has been laid on Asch's profound scholarship,<sup>4</sup> let me cite in conclusion just two more of the scores of egregious historical and archaeological blunders which mar his work. What *scholar* would consistently refer to the ruling Tetrarch of Galilee as Herod *Antipater*? Flavius Josephus, the famous and almost contemporary Jewish historian (who is of course followed by all responsible writers), gives the Tetrarch's correct name as Herod *Antipas*, carefully distinguishing him from *Antipater*, whom Herod the Great executed five days before his own death in 4 B. C. (about the exact date when Christ was born). Thus, Asch displays an utter ignorance of the family of Herod the Great—builder of the Temple which figures so largely in his pages. Challenging Matthew (v, 38-42), Asch says that at the time of Christ the Pharisees did not interpret literally the phrase, "an eye for an

<sup>4</sup> We are told that his work is the result of thirty years' study.

eye, a tooth for a tooth." Yet, as late as 90 A. D., the well-known Rabbi Eliezer still held to the literal interpretation, and Flavius Josephus (*Antiq.*, IV, viii. 35) states that it was optional for the injured party to demand that a like injury be inflicted on the wrongdoer.

## Faith at Work

ALBERT M. ROSSETTI, O.P.

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**"B**EAUTIFUL are the things that are seen, more beautiful are the things that are understood, but by far the most beautiful things are those which are ignored." The use of faith in our work is one of the most beautiful things in the world, and it is seldom utilized today. Consider the wonderful cathedral of Milan. Its unique form and order please the human eye, and men call it beautiful. To an architect the cathedral is more beautiful because he understands the principles of its construction. Yet few admirers of the Milan Cathedral ever realize the most beautiful thing about the cathedral, namely, the fact that it was built by faith. The men who labored so long and well to build the cathedral were men of strong lively Catholic faith. Their work was a labor of love for the God of their belief. These men put their faith to work and thus produced wonderful results. "In the Middle Ages Gothic architects fashioned poems in stone for the delight of heaven. Metal workers wove iron gratings as fine as black lace. Deft fingers wrought laces, copes and chasubles; weavers their gorgeous tapestries; and glaziers dyed windows in rainbow tints, all for the glory of God."

These men of old knew that faith could aid their work and that their work helped their piety. Catholics of today can do likewise, if they use the power of their God-given gift of faith. Saint Paul gives us a

working definition of faith in his epistle to the Hebrews: "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not. . . . By faith we understand that the world was framed by the word of God; that from invisible things visible things might be made. . . . Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. xi, 1, 3, 6).

What things did the cathedral builders hope for? The artistic cathedral spires point heavenwards like a million fingers to the answer: God, in Whom is the evidence or cause "of things that appear not." Because of this, Communists have ridiculed Catholic workers saying: "You work for pie that is in the sky, while we work for pie on earth." In return, we respond that it is far better to store our riches in heaven than on earth. Christ Himself tells us to lay up treasures in heaven, "where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal." Hence, it is better to work with God through our faith. Of course, it is no easy task to practise faith in this modern Godless era. Like the pagans of old we are too busy with earthly pursuits and pleasures to think of God as we should. We usually remember Him at our brief morning and evening prayers and at Sunday Mass. But what about the rest of the time; how often do we think of God while we are at work or play? Is it any wonder then that we fail to receive many of the things we hope for in our life.

Difficult it is to think of God in a world full of distractions that make up everyone's workaday life. From morning till night our attention is taken up with visible things around us. Long dreary hours plus insufficient wages keep our minds busy about other things than God. And if we are out of work, we become hopeless; we think everything is lost, except the daily mounting grocery, clothes and rent bills. How can we look up at God, when we are constantly being forced to look to earth for our daily bread?

If we are running a lathe in a machine shop, or doing any other work that demands precision, all our attention must be concentrated upon the job at hand. Nor can a laborer in a steel mill stop to meditate on the benevolence of God, while he is sweating from every pore at the job of unloading a long row of red-hot furnaces. Some automatic tasks do leave a worker with ample time for reflection on spiritual matters. But this time is usually spent in useless conversations, daydreaming, or in planning how we are going to enjoy evenings and week-ends. At times it is spent in thinking and talking about God and the whence, why, and where of human life. However, the results are not always inspiring. Factory and office workers are not supposed to be theologians anyway.

Putting our faith to work, then, seems to be a problem. But like most problems the solution is easy if we know how to go about it. Granted that our world is full of distractions, yet, as we already know, God is everywhere. His divine power moves within and around us. So, regardless of what constitutes our workaday problems, God knows the solution and He will help us solve our difficulties if we have faith in Him. God helps those who try to help themselves, so we must do our part of the work. All our daily actions of thought, word and deed should be dedicated to the honor and glory of God. Faith elevates our simplest acts to the high plane of virtue and merit. A glass of water given in the name of Jesus brings a greater reward spiritually than a rich man's natural donation to the community chest.

The power of faith is most essential, when we are out of a job and despair grips us. Then faith reminds our sinking hearts that God is our Father Who knows all we need. He has given us everything, and if, at times, He takes away something we desire, faith tells us it is for our own good. Too often the enjoyment of our material wealth tends to make us forget God.

The only time we can truly say we have lost everything is when through sin we have lost God's love. Even then our case is not entirely hopeless. God always gives us the grace to return to Him. And as for jobs that demand our closest attention, faith recalls to our minds that God is deeply interested in all our actions both external and internal. What joy should be in our souls, when we know by faith that God, the Master Craftsman of the entire universe, is watching our work!

The people who do their work with a strong faith in God are thrice blessed. They possess a confidence, peace and joy that conquers all the trials and hardships of the world. The power of faith in our work brings with it a reliance upon God for its result. If we have done our part of the job faithfully, God will take care of the rest. At times the result of faith confirms the old saying that "Truth is stranger than fiction." For example, I know a fine Catholic policeman and father of a large family who learned that his two weeks' wages were delayed due to a shortage of city tax income caused by the depression. Returning home that evening, his wife informed him that the family had nothing to eat for supper. Undaunted the father told the family to sit at table just as usual. He had barely finished saying grace before meals, when a knock was heard on the door. It was their next-door neighbor carrying a basket. He related that his family and friends had just returned from a very enjoyable picnic and fishing trip. His party had more fish and food than it could use, so would they accept the basket of food and fresh fish? Strange are the ways of God's Providence.

The peace that comes with faith in God is permanent. Unlike worldly peace it isn't a calm before the storms of war. Godlike peace is "The tranquillity of well established order." Faith accomplishes this noble result by equalizing our viewpoint on human existence.

By nature we tend to observe everything in the world from a materialistic aspect. Our natural sight often obscures the vision of the supernatural around and within us. Faith balances our vision and we realize that we were created in a supernatural state, that we were reborn spiritually by Baptism and the Passion of Christ, that natural joys can never perfectly satisfy us, that we need spiritual graces and life for our perfection, and that God is our true last end. Thus faith gives us a proper focus on Christian life. With this view ever before us, ours is a peace that will never be destroyed by earthly tribulations. It is the same peace that Christ gave to His disciples, when they were sent out into the world to preach the Gospel. Christ foretold the trials that would afflict them, yet He also assured them that His peace would abide with them and they would emerge victorious over the evils that beset their paths to eternal glory. This same divine assurance is ours, if we utilize the power of our faith. Christ is the Author of our faith. Hence all our work performed with faith will have some bearing on our supernatural end, God, because the object of science is truth, the object of morality is goodness, and the object of art is beauty. But all three objects in the fullness of their perfection are found in God Who is TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY.

Faith carries with it a unique joy to the busy worker in factory or home. What joy can compare with that of a person who has done a good day's work for God's honor and glory? Thanks to God's gift of faith: "One's life may be a glorious hymn, an ever chanted song, though little things and weary toil may fill it all the day long." Faith in God built the beautiful marble cathedrals of the world. In the eyes of mankind, our own faithful daily work may not produce works of art, but in God's sight, we are building sparkling cathedrals of merit in heaven.



# Women's "Rights" in the Catholic Church

RUTH BYRNS

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**T**HE inherent dignity of human beings according to the teachings of the Catholic Church comes from the rational and spiritual nature which they possess. Since this nature is common to all human beings—men and women of all races and of every period and civilization—the essential dignity and worth of woman as a human creature is equal to and similar to that of man.

In the early teachings and practices of the Church are to be found all of the basic principles on which the freedom of women today rests.

The position of women, however, in any age or society or within any institution or organization is indicated more truly by prevailing practices than by principles. To appreciate the position of women within the early Church, it is necessary to remember that in pre-Christian times and in pagan society throughout the first centuries of Christianity, a woman had only one vocation—to be a wife and mother and to please the man to whom she was subject—her father, later her husband, still later, perhaps, her son. Within the Church this was not the case. From the earliest days of Christianity the Church recognized the right of women to choose a way of life other than matrimony. Communities of unmarried women who dedicated themselves to prayer, teaching and the performance of the corporal works of mercy were to be found throughout the early Christian world. The existence of these communities shows that the spiritual, intellectual and temporal independence of women was really recognized and had meaning.

Another significant practice of the Catholic Church in this respect is to be found in the fact that throughout the centuries women as well as men have been canonized or declared saints. Canonization is a declaration, by the Church, that the person canonized lived a life of heroic virtue. The capacity of women to achieve sanctity—the true Christian way of life—has never been challenged.

The diversity of the works performed by the women saints demonstrates that within the Catholic Church it has always been recognized that there are many ways for a woman to live the good life. Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, Saint Joan of Arc, Saint Catherine of Siena, who was one of the strongest political and religious figures in the fourteenth century, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary who founded two Orders of nursing Sisters, other women saints who founded schools for girls or charitable institutions for the care of the poor and yet other women saints who were missionaries, give some idea of the variety of good works accomplished by the women who have been named saints.

Women have always been admitted to all the work of the Church except to the priesthood. Women may not receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders—that is, become priests—but the doctrine of the Church which places this restriction on women does not imply nor has it been interpreted to imply any general inferiority of women. Women have always been permitted to give religious instruction to children and to adults and they have always been permitted to administer the Sacrament of Baptism. Educated women have always contributed to the cultural and intellectual enterprises of the Church. In the fifth century, for example, a group of women including Fabiola, Paula, Paulina and Blaesilla, assisted Saint Jerome in his work of translation and revision of the Latin text of the Bible.

## THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN WITH MEN

From the founding of the Church, then, there has been a constant tradition, based on positive teaching, that, as far as the Church is concerned, women share equally with men all human rights and spiritual equalities.

With this tradition as a background, the development of the immensely important women's religious communities was quite natural. Communities of women — convents — existed from the early days of Christianity. As these communities grew in size and in number with the spread of Christianity, each one adopted a "rule" or a system of organization and government. The head of each convent and the head of each group of convents when a number of them were organized under one "rule" or belonged to one "Order" was a woman. Great executive ability was required of these women and great respect was shown to them. From the early Middle Ages to the present day the religious communities of women governed by women have been responsible for carrying out varied and highly important work.

In the Middle Ages, for example, the convents collected libraries and copied books and manuscripts; they (together with the men's Religious Orders) carried on the work that today is done by social agencies — visiting the sick, caring for the poor, providing for orphans; they did nursing and teaching, painting and weaving, and writing. Any woman who entered a convent might, if she showed sufficient ability, become its Superior.

The debt that the women's movement today owes to the nuns and Sisters—members of religious communities—who did the pioneer work in almost every field where women have today achieved a position of prominence is indeed a very large debt. They demonstrated for centuries that women can be efficient and

effective as administrators and executives, they showed that women can establish and direct good schools, found excellent hospitals and social agencies and that women can live useful and heroic lives outside a home and family circle as well as within the Sacrament of Matrimony. In this connection it is interesting to note in passing that when the great Florence Nightingale went to Crimea at the head of a staff of nurses she was accompanied by a force of fifteen nuns from England and followed in a short time by another group of nuns who went from Ireland to help her carry on her work. This is seldom remarked, for it was not at all unusual for nuns to go from European countries to distant lands on such missions.

What is the status of women in the Catholic Church today? What is the Catholic attitude toward "the woman's movement?"

In keeping with the tradition of the Church, the right of women to choose their vocations is unquestioned. The woman who chooses to marry, the woman who enters a Religious Order and the woman who neither marries nor becomes a member of a religious community are all accorded the same respect within the Catholic Church. Since it is natural for the greater number of Catholic women—as well as the great number of non-Catholic women—to marry, the Church has, in recent years, given special attention to the position of married women and to the problem they face in the modern world.

#### TRUE MARRIAGE A PERMANENT BOND

The Catholic Church teaches that true marriage is a permanent bond. The Church also teaches that it is a sin against God and against nature to prevent deliberately the conception of children. It is also a teaching of the Church that the married woman must accommodate herself to whatever is "demanded by

the good of the family and the right ordering and unity and stability of home life."

Any nation or any movement within any country which claims to emancipate women by advocating divorce, contraceptive birth control or an "independence" of married women which interferes with proper attention to children husband and family is condemned by the Catholic Church. In the words of the late Pope Pius XI:

This, however, is not the true emancipation of woman, nor that rational and exalted liberty which belongs to the noble office of a Christian woman and wife; it is rather the debasing of the womanly character, and the dignity of womanhood, and indeed of the whole family, as a result of which the husband suffers the loss of his wife, the children of their mother, and the home and the whole family of an ever watchful guardian . . . if the woman descends from her truly regal throne to which she has been raised within the walls of the home by means of the Gospel, she will soon be reduced to the old state of slavery (if not in appearance, certainly in reality) and become as amongst the pagans the mere instrument of man.

Catholic women who are not devoting their lives to family matters are to be found in every profession and field of work where any women have been admitted. Women hold important and responsible positions in institutions and enterprises which exist within the Catholic Church. For example, there are women on the editorial staffs of Catholic newspapers and magazines, there are women deans in the largest Catholic universities in many cities.

Within the religious communities—often regarded as "medieval" and out of touch with modern conditions—women continue to perform responsible and courageous work. Sisters are working, today, in the laboratories and professional colleges of nearly all of the great universities, there are other Sisters who are medical missionaries, others who are teachers, nurses and social workers. In large industrial cities, Sisters maintain free day nurseries to care for the children of

mothers who are obliged to work; in the southern part of the United States Sisters have established and at present conduct a settlement for lepers; in various parts of the world, for example in New York City, Sisters conduct homes for the poor who are suffering from incurable cancer; in countless Houses of the Good Shepherd Sisters work to rehabilitate delinquent girls and women.

Women in the Catholic Church have always been realistic in recognizing that rights carry with them corresponding duties. The Catholic teaching, therefore, that women have the same essential dignity and rights that men possess means that women also have the same duties as men. To practise charity, to teach the truth, to have responsibility for the welfare of others and to work for justice are, then, today as always the concern of Catholic women as they should be the concern of all human beings. Catholic women will continue to accept these duties.

\* \* \* \*

A modern world has given us luxuries; but has it given us happiness? It has given us the best equipment, the most elaborate in amusement, the most comfortable in luxurious living; but it has not given the very thing that is the quest of the heart of man, i. e., happiness. Happiness is too intangible for material devices to manipulate. It belongs to the spirit of man. It is strictly an ethical thing, and is produced by moral living. No amount of mechanisms can produce it; and luxurious indulgence may cause it to flee from us altogether. For, happiness is spiritual and it responds to spiritual harmony. Perfect happiness can never be attained in this world, though much happiness is attainable. The soul of man will always feel a void; even in the midst of plenty, there will always be a loneliness. For material things cannot fully satisfy the spiritual nature of man.—Michael J. Miller, O.S.M., *The Servite*.

# **The Character of the Jesuit Order**

*A Sermon Delivered at Saint Francis Xavier's Church, New  
York, on the occasion of the Quadricentennial of  
the Society of Jesus.*

**O**N September 27, 1540, Pope Paul bestowed pontifical approval on the dynamic new religious project of Ignatius Loyola, called the Company of Jesus. We memorialize that outstanding event in Church history and world development and we celebrate it for itself and for the myriad of other great events and persons for which it was responsible.

The four hundredth birthday of the Society brings joy to 26,309 sons of Loyola scattered over the entire world in 1,531 houses, of fifty provinces and in more than forty nations. Along the icy stretches of the Arctics, in the jungles and sandy wastes of the Tropics, on bleak mountains and in verdant valleys of these many countries, in teeming metropolitan congestion and in rural isolation the living members of the Society join with the legions of their departed brethren in Heaven above in rejoicing on this great occasion.

## **APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION**

Holy Mother Church celebrates this significant event through the Pope, the Hierarchy and the clergy. His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, issues to the Society of Jesus an Apostolic letter which echoes enthusiastically the appreciation of the Church universal for the four hundred years of service rendered to it by the illustrious company of gentlemen pledged by definite profession to warfare for Christ, to unflinching, steady and emergency support of the Church, and to active and enthusiastic devotion to the Holy See and the Hier-

archy. The Cardinals, Bishops and clergy consort these days with the legions of Loyola in grateful celebration. They share the appreciation of the Society expressed by Pope Urban VII, August 16, 1623.

The religious sons of this Society, following the luminous way of so great a parent, continue to give an unfailing example of the religious virtues and a distinguished proficiency in every kind of learning, more especially in sacred, so that, as their cooperation is a great service in the successful conduct in the most important affairs of the Catholic Church, in the restoration of morality and in the liberal culture of young men, they merit new proofs of Apostolic favor.

You of the laity represent the vast army of the living and the dead who are, and who, for four centuries, have been, beneficiaries of the progressive and varied ministrations of the members of the Society of Jesus. Survey even sketchily this army of the laity indebted to the Society and celebrating with it the world over. In 67,117 Sodalities there are 5,000,000 Sodalists. In 12,084 schools are 533,903 students. 140,000 of these pupils are taught by 3,500 members of the Society in fifteen universities and 421 colleges and schools of secondary education. In missionary fields 3,785 members of the Society conduct fifty-four missions for 3,000,000 Catholics and 300,000 catechumens. For these inhabitants of the missions are conducted 8,359 educational institutions with a total student population of 481,800.

#### HIGHLIGHTS AND SHADOWS

This is but a small part of the army of the Catholic laity who are reached by the activities of the Society and who rejoice in its strength and service on its four hundredth birthday. To this one must add the millions of Catholics administered to in their parishes, preached to on missions and retreats and influenced by about 150,000 authors of books, and contributors to periodicals covering every phase of literature and the sciences. Over and above the far-flung family of Cath-



olics who glory with the members of Saint Ignatius religious family are millions of non-Catholics who acknowledge their debt and the debt of civilization and culture to the great works of the members of the Society.

The highlights of a painting are emphasized by its somber shadows. The glorious achievements of the Society of Jesus stand out more vividly against the background of black and traducing indictments leveled against it. The symphony of praise of the Society of Popes, prelates and people is more significant when heard against the background of the silence of the envious or the sinister slander of the unenlightened. Of those who, in the past or today, would remain mute or would damn instead of praise there is not time to speak in refutation. They are a small and insignificant minority when compared to the intelligent, grateful and outspoken millions who rejoice today that the Company of Jesus, "scarlet and splendid with eternal slander," has endured, vigorously and fruitfully for four centuries.

#### DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

It might be interesting to analyze the character of this religious order that has so endeared itself to Christendom since Orders, like individuals, possess distinctive characters. In the analysis of this character you may discover the deeper secret of the ability of the Society of Jesus to make itself almost indispensable in the campaign to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. In the understanding of this character you detect why the Society enjoys the confidence not only of its own members and of the laity but of the Papacy and the Hierarchy as well.

The Society of Jesus is faithful to the ideals for the realization of which it was established and because of which it was approved. It has never ceased, in the spirit of Ignatius, the urbane courtier and intrepid

soldier, to fight *for* Christ and the greater glory of God, and *against* the enemies of the Church and Christian civilization. Neither economic, political and social security on the one hand nor poverty, political oppression and public derision on the other have deterred the Society from constant memory of its sacred ideals and endless endeavor to realize them.

The Company of Jesus has a most marked ability to win the undeviating loyalty of its own members. Without disparagement of the glories or efforts of other Religious Orders, of other shock troops in the campaign for Christ, it succeeds in imbedding in its own young men the realization that their Society is, for them and for the Church, of paramount importance and of unquestionable worth. This very distinctive and enviable loyalty, this family pride are impossible of achievement even by vow of complete obedience or by fear. They are created in the members of the Society, even when they are freedom-loving American youths, because the Society is able to present to them a record of four centuries of gorgeous service, a record glittering with extraordinary achievements and the names of gigantic geniuses, a record so stirring as to arouse the loyal pride of all.

#### FOUR CENTURIES OF VITALITY

The Society of Jesus during the four centuries of its existence has displayed a vitality identical with that with which the Holy Spirit protects the Church of Jesus. The numerical membership of the Society has always been phenomenal even when insufficient to meet the demands made of it for workmen in the vineyard of the Lord. Its geographical expansion, in wake of pioneer explorers and along the teeming boulevards of congested metropolitan areas also has been and is phenomenal. Its ability to maintain and deepen the solidarity of the Society amid shifting secular political

forms and kaleidoscopic national and racial spirits is a mysterious evidence of a vitality more than natural.

But the most convincing evidence of life in the Society is the ability of this religious family to triumph over the erosive factors to which all human institutions are subjected and to emerge, vibrant and dynamic, from the shadows of death that have enveloped it. There is scarcely a European country from which, at some time or other, it has not been expelled. Suppressed by Pope Clement XIV in 1773, it lay torn and bleeding for forty-one years until reestablished by Pope Pius VII in 1814, a little more than a century ago. In this century is seen clearly and convincingly the marvelous and vital power of the Society to recover, to leap with superhuman agility from country to country, to span the oceans and to take root even in stony soil unwanted by others. They have grown to over 26,000 members. In their many-faceted activities, in countries of peace and in nations at war, they are a living proof of mysterious vitality.

In the Society of Jesus affinity with great men and marvelous deeds has created a determination and an industrious effort to sustain the glories of the past, to reproduce today the energy of the pioneers and to keep faith with their example. By their apostolic labors, each generation and each individual seems to add new increment to community reputation and the glory of Christ.

#### THE ROLL OF HONOR

Personal sanctification and salvation are the ultimate motives of all members of religious communities no matter to what special cause they be dedicated. In the religious life that combines both contemplation and action; personal sanctification *for* work, *in* work and *through* work is the secret of apostolic industry. They are almost inseparables. We are justified therefore in expecting great holiness in the character of a society distinguished for industry. We do not look

in vain for such sanctity on both heroic and less lofty levels. Do you ask for proof of the power of life in the Society to produce heroic sanctity? Twenty-four members of the Society of Jesus have been canonized, twelve of them martyrs. 141 have been beatified, of whom 136 died for the Faith. 185 have been declared "Venerable." Do you ask evidence of the ability of Ignatian life to create high spirituality? The eagerness of men and women, religious and lay, who take the work of personal perfection seriously, to procure the expert direction, printed, written and oral, of members of this Society is a sure indication that the passing of 400 years has not blunted the drive of the Society of Jesus for the perfection of its own members.

#### THE FRUITS OF PERSECUTION

In analyzing the character of the Society, objective students are impressed by the humility which has manifested itself in dignified silence under attack and patient endurance of suffering and persecution. Some identify dignity with haughty pride and confuse humility with cringing sycophancy. Correct thinkers know that pride is blatant and aggressive while humility is silent, inoffensive and genuinely dignified. Correct thinkers know too that groveling cannot be reconciled with the thinking or the living of men who are passionately devoted to human freedom, psychological and political, and that voluntary submission and meekness are the powers that emerge from Christlike humility. To develop this dignified humility the Society of Jesus has had many opportunities in the innumerable oppressions, confiscations, discriminations and persecutions to which it has been subjected. On this occasion may Heaven be thanked that it has not only met them successfully but by humble endurance of them has created within the Society and its members a soul of steel that will stiffen it for strifes the future is sure to bring to all of us.

Another quality in the character of the Society of Jesus is its capacity to produce leadership. So consistently and steadily has this been evident through four centuries that one is forced to the conviction that such achievement is due, not to accident or miracle, but to the normal operation of the spirit and mechanism of the Society. Mediocrity seems to be feared and excellence, for the sake of Christ and the salvation of souls, is demanded. The results of this holy urge for excellence have been very beneficial for the arts, the sciences and for all other approaches to civilization and culture. Discoverers, explorers, scientists, scholars, poets, literary geniuses and leaders in every sphere of learning and life parade across the stage of 400 years in the black soutane of the Society of Jesus eliciting the grateful acclaim of unbiased lovers of human betterment.

#### LOYALTY TO THE HOLY SEE

The quality of which the Society itself is probably most proud is that of loyalty and mobile service to the Church of Jesus Christ and to the Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. In the Providence of God and in the procedure of the Church it is for flexible, mobile, emergency, defensive or aggressive service to the Church and to the Holy See, that Religious Orders originate and are approved. By such selfless service and generous loyalty over a stretch of 400 years the Society of Jesus has continued to deserve that approbation conferred on it in 1540. Of our late and beloved Supreme Pontiff, Pius XI, it has been written by Father Philip Hughes, in the *Dublin Review*, April, 1939, "The known affection of Pius XI for the Society, the succession of important Catholic works he committed to its members, . . . had much more than personal preference behind it. Tasks needed doing and the Pope wanted to be assured that there would always be men competent for the work, and that

these could somehow be rapidly mobilized. And in the Society of Jesus he found a whole corps of specialists who could adapt themselves, technicians prepared at a moment's notice to fill gaps and, if need be, spend their lives filling gaps."

I have presented to you in broad outline a picture of those who rejoice with the Society of Jesus in its fourth centennial year. I have presented merely a few outstanding qualities in the character of the Order which commands such respect. I ask, in conclusion that our joy take practical form.

Rejoice with the Sons of Ignatius. Respect as Catholics and friends the exalted stature of the Legions of Loyola. Manifest by encouragement, fidelity and support the gratitude these valiant defenders of Christ have deserved. Pray God, from grateful and hopeful hearts, to bless them abundantly with a continuance of vocations worthy of the mission and of the historical and contemporary achievements of the Order. Pray God that they may continue to grow in numbers, in power, in sanctity and in consecrated service for the integrity and perpetuity of the United States of America, for the betterment of society, for the salvation of souls, for the strength of the Church and for the greater glory of God.

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When Christian ideals are being shattered by the worship of the terrible god of war, when human life and human personality are being totally obliterated by the most savage methods of warfare, when non-combatants equally with combatants are the victims of the vengeful spirit that seems to possess the leaders of the aggressive nations, we must all cling to the Cross of Christ and to the feet of the Prince of Peace as the last hope of mankind.—Monsignor John R. Mulroy.

# Some Things Old and New

## PIUS VI AND REGICIDE

**I**N YOUR reply on tyrannicide, you referred to the Allocution of Pius VI on the judicial murder of Louis XVI of France, says a student. What, he asks, did the Pope actually say?

This is a very proper question to ask, in view of anti-Catholic propaganda. But as the Allocution was a long one, it is possible to quote only the opening part. Addressing the Cardinals on June 17, 1793, Pope Pius VI had this to say about the execution of the King of France:

"By a conspiracy of impious men, the Most Christian King, Louis XVI, has been condemned to the penalty of death, and the sentence executed.

"What was that judgment, and for what reason was it executed? We will tell in a few words. That sentence was pronounced by the National Convention, without a shadow of authority.

"That assembly, after abolishing monarchy, which is the most natural form of government, had attributed almost all public power to the populace, who follow no wisdom and no counsel, and has no understanding of things. . . . The most ferocious part of the populace, not satisfied with destroying the king's authority, resolved to deprive him of life. It bade those who had accused become judges: they openly declared their hostility to their prince. Nay more, at the very door of the hall, where judgment was to be pronounced, men still more wicked had been summoned, whose threats were to swell the number of condemners to a majority over those who would show a more lenient policy. Yet even so, they did not succeed—the king was immolated by a minority. . . .

“... Ah, France! who didst ask for a Catholic king—because the fundamental laws of the kingdom would suffer none but a Catholic king—lo, now that that hadst a Catholic, thou hast slain him solely because he was a Catholic!”

#### IMPRIMATUR

A Protestant gentleman who is given to the reading of Catholic books, wants to know if the *Imprimatur*, which is to be found at the beginning of every Catholic book, means that the contents of such a book has received the official approval of the Church.

No, it does not mean that. All it means is that the individual Bishop who permitted the printing and publishing of the book or pamphlet, is of the opinion that its contents may be read without any danger to Faith or Morals.

What happens is this, and the case is the same in every diocese or other ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The manuscript is first carefully read by the official censor, and if he finds nothing contrary to Faith or Morals, he gives this manuscript his approval, *Nihil obstat*, which means that there is nothing against it. After that, when the censor's report has been handed in the Bishop adds the word *Imprimatur*, which means that it may be printed—and that is the end of it.

But certain published documents do represent the official approval and teaching of the Church. These are, first of all, Papal Encyclicals and Decretal Letters or Papal Bulls. Then come decrees of the Sacred Congregations and, of course, any *Motu proprio* which the Pope may choose to issue on his own behalf. But these documents do not require the *Imprimatur*, because they originate either from the Pope or directly from the Papal chanceries, and so are either the personal expression of the Pope's own teaching, or are issued by one of the Congregations or Tribunals which represent the Pope and speak in his name.